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Even before COVID, we were already in the middle of a youth mental health crisis and the pandemic has only exacerbated the stress on kids' mental health. The statistics are staggering and heartbreaking.

From 2009 to 2017, depression spiked 69 percent among 16 to 17-year-olds, according to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health. From 2009 to 2021, according to a Centers for Disease Control study, the share of high school students experiencing “persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness” rose from 26 percent to 44 percent. Suicide is the third-leading cause of death in 15- to 19-year olds. And according to the [CDC](#), in 2020, suicide was the second leading cause of death for children ages 10-14.

There's a gender gap in adolescent mental health and [research](#) shows it is girls who are disproportionately affected.

In the United States, major depression among teen girls increased significantly from 2011 (12%) to 2017 (20%). And in 2015 alone, compared to 2010 three times as many 10- to 14-year-old girls were admitted to emergency rooms after deliberately harming themselves.

Between 2019 and 2021, emergency room visits for suicide attempts rose 51 percent for teen girls and 4 percent for boys. Half of all mental health conditions start by age 14, but most go undetected and as a result are untreated. We must pay closer attention.

Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA) initiated a national partnership with NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness. NAMI will serve as the Subject Matter Expert for the development of mental wellness workshops for girls, launching in July 2023, and for the gsLearn Mental Wellness 101 course for Girl Scout volunteers and staff which launched this past summer.

GSCWM secured its first grant, \$3000 from the North Central Community Foundation, to launch “Joy in Art and Nature”, an 8-week series we’ll pilot at Athol Elementary School next month. The program targets girls in kindergarten through third grade and leads participants toward mental health awareness through a blend of self-help practices, creative expression and healthy outdoor activities. Participants will complete activities to earn both the “Outdoor Art Maker” badge and “Resilient. Ready. Strong. patch. They’ll be exploring nature and connecting with others with the goal of helping girls build inner strength and resilience and learn science-backed, mood-boosting skills as they explore their own creativity and mindfulness strategies in an environment conducive to positive mental health.

Children today are being challenged in ways we’ve never experienced or imagined. While we do not proclaim to be mental health experts, we do profess to be a trusted space for girls to interact with caring, supportive adults, to provide opportunities for our members to develop friendships and offer a sense of belonging and a place to take positive risks and build confidence so they can build social-emotional skills, practice gratitude and giving, experience nature and find community.

I hope this first Art and Joy in Nature program for Athol girls is just the beginning of what we can offer to help girls understand how to boost their own mental wellness, how to reach out for help when needed and how to support others.

Additional links and resources to share:

[Web resources for kids, teens, young adults, and their families](#)

[Youth and young adult resources](#)

[Advocate for change](#)

[En Español](#)

Sincerely,
Pattie Hallberg,
CEO Girl Scouts of Central and Western Massachusetts